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YOUR MARKET BASKET AND WHAT IT MEANS

A radio talk by Mr. J. O. Clarke, Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration, delivered from the Chicago studios of the National Broadcasting Company, through 35 associated stations, April 7, 1930.

Let us take a look into the average market basket that will be placed on the kitchen table in hundreds of thousands of American homes next Saturday afternoon. It will contain many things good to eat which have come to you from literally all over the world and by many different routes. Every item of food in the basket will probably be pure and truthfully labeled because American producers and importers of food know that it is good business to handle only this class of merchandise and because there are on the statute books of this country, pure food laws effectively enforced by the Federal Government and various State and City organizations.

Our basket probably contains a pound or two of butter, a small sack of flour, a dozen eggs, some canned vegetables, a jar or two of jam, a half dozen grape fruit, some nuts, and a cake or two of chocolate for the children. Let me tell you how some of these items get to your market basket and what your Government does to see that they are pure and truthfully labeled.

The butter is probably in quarter pound prints. It started on its journey to you in the form of milk which was produced in a dairy from healthy cows under sanitary conditions. The cows are healthy and the dairy is sanitary because the average producer wants to keep his premises clean and to own healthy cattle, but if he were not so minded, he would be afraid to do otherwise because the State inspector and the State veterinarian comes around every once in a while and compels him to observe the laws requiring healthy cattle and clean barns, milk house and utensils. By the time the butter starts on its initial journey to you, the first step in its manufacture has taken place and it is in the form of cream and is sold to a creamery where it is manufactured into butter. This creamery is frequently inspected by food inspectors and operates in a clean and sanitary fashion. The creamery manager has a fat tester to make sure that the butter he produces contains the 80% of butter fat required by the law. He also uses accurate scales so that each pound or quarter pound print is full weight. After the creamery man has changed the cream to butter he ships it in refrigerator cars to a wholesale dealer in your town or frequently to the retailer from whom you made your purchase. When the shipment reaches your city, it may be met by a Government food inspector who will weigh it on accurate scales to see if it is full weight and who takes samples to the laboratory where it is analyzed by expert chemists to find out if it contains the proper amount of butter fat. If the Government finds that the butter is short weight or contains less than 80% of butterfat, the shipment would be seized and would, therefore, not reach its privileged place in your market basket. Incidentally, in Chicago alone the Food and Drug Administration recently examined samples from some 750,000 pounds of butter and seized more than 100,000 pounds because it contained less than 80% of fat. The seized butter was not destroyed, but the owners were compelled to re-work it to remove the excess water and bring the fat above the 80% limit.

The two cakes of chocolate, which you will probably give to the children as an added inducement to persuade them to drink their daily quota of milk, has come a long way and has gone through many changes before it reached your market basket. It was made from cocoa beans probably grown in Africa or South America.

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Cocoa beans come to America in enormous quantities, but all of them are not allowed to continue the journey toward your basket. When they arrive in New York or other sea ports they are met by food inspectors who carefully examine them and if they are contaminated with wormy cocoa beans or with moldy cocoa beans they are not allowed to come into America. Those beans that pass the close scrutiny of the ports of entry are carried to large manufacturing plants where they are carefully cleaned and roasted, crushed, and combined with sugar, milk, and perhaps, nuts. The milk comes from the same kind of inspected dairy as produced the milk for your butter. The nuts that may go into the cake of chocolate probably came from abroad and were subjected to careful inspection at the ports where they entered America. The cake of chocolate in your basket contains the full amount of cocoa fat and the full amount of milk, because most chocolate manufacturers want to sell pure and unadulterated chocolate, but if he were otherwise minded and decided to skimp on milk or to substitute some other fat for the cocoa fat, the food inspectors would find out about it, samples of his goods would be analyzed, and they would be seized before they could be sold to you.

Let's see about the jar of strawberry jam. It started on its journey last summer when the berries were ripe and juicy. The fruit was picked at just the right time and carefully inspected to remove any berries that were moldy or damaged. It was then packed in barrels with high grade granulated sugar, immediately frozen solid and shipped to the jam factory. When the time came to make the jam, the frozen berries were mixed with just the right amount of sugar - 45 pounds of fruit and 55 pounds of sugar - cooked in large kettles and put in the jars while hot. Now let's go back and see what the food inspectors have been doing all along. When the berries came to the freezing plant very likely they were on hand to see to it that no objectionable or dirty fruit was started on its journey in the mass of frozen fruit and sugar. Again we might find them in the cold storage plant equipped with motor driven drills, taking samples of the frozen fruit. We will doubtless find them in the jam factory and finally they will, perhaps, take some sample of the finished jam so that expert chemists can analyze it to make sure that it contains the full amount of fruit and sugar and nothing else. With these inspectors and chemists busy all along the route from the strawberry patch to the finished jar of jam, I think you will agree with me that the jar in your market basket is pure and unadulterated.

I could tell you a story about every item in the basket as full and complete as the stories of your butter, jam, and chocolate. For instance, I might tell you how the inspectors and chemists do their work on canned tomatoes to make sure that they reach you without added water; how these men check the weight of your flour so that when the label says 12 pounds it means that you are getting 12 pounds and not 11 1/2 pounds; how the eggs are examined when they come into the market and those that are not satisfactory to eat discarded; how the grape fruit must be ripe and juicy; and about the nuts which may have been imported from the far corners of the earth, but are carefully examined before being allowed to come into this country. This story would be entirely too long and I am leaving you with the thought that every article in your market basket not only those in this particular market basket, but in any other, is subject to the same careful inspection before it is allowed to take its privileged position in the market baskets of the American housewife.